



Special Report: Gauteng Xenophobic Attacks February 2017

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26 February 2017

Over the past two years, xenophobic violence has claimed lives and destroyed property in communities across South Africa. As shown in Table 1, nearly 70 people have died, over 100 have been assaulted, close to 600 shops have been looted and over 10,000 people have been displaced due to xenophobic incidents between January 2015 and January 2017. Since official figures are not released by the South African Police Service, figures in Table 1 are based on media reports which likely underestimate the total number of victims during attacks.

Table 1: Xenophobic Incidents across South Africa between January 2015 and January 2017

Type of Incident	Number of Reports
Deaths	66
Assaults	116
Looted	571
People Displaced	11,140

This special report provides a time line of xenophobic events in Gauteng province during February 2017. Information is based predominantly on media reports¹ as well as reports from Xenowatch partners which include the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Between 05 and 24 February this year, community raids of foreign-owned or occupied residences and businesses led to the victimisation of well over 60 individuals, including foreign nationals and South African citizens.

¹ Links to sources are embedded within text throughout the document.



Table 2 provides descriptive information on events that transpired during attacks this month. In many cases, the exact number of victims is unknown. In each location, multiple homes and businesses were looted. The total number of victims is likely higher than those presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Nature of Xenophobic Incidents between 2 and 24 February, 2017

Location	Date of Attack	Number of Known Victims	Number of Homes Looted	Number of Businesses Looted	Reported Numbers of Attackers	Numbers and Nationality of Victims
Rosettenville	5 Feb	>4	3	1	500	• At least 4 Nigerian nationals
Rosettenville	11 Feb	>16	12	1	Hundreds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 1 South African national • At least 10 Nigerian nationals • At least 1 Ethiopian national • At least 4 Malawian nationals • Numerous Zimbabwean & Mozambican nationals
Pretoria West	6* and 18 Feb	>8	Multiple	1	300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple South African nationals • At least 3 Nigerian nationals • Multiple Congolese nationals • At least 1 Zimbabwean national
Atteridgeville, Lotus Gardens & Mamelodi East	20 Feb	>30	-	30	Large groups	UNKN
Atteridgeville	24 Feb	Multiple	UNKN	Multiple	UNKN	UNKN
March Pretoria CBD	24 Feb	Multiple	-	Multiple	>1000	• Multiple Somali nationals

* Exact date unknown, the business of a Nigerian national was set on fire two weeks prior to 02/18.

** Unknown

While some officials have publicly denied xenophobic motives behind recent events, foreign nationals and South African citizens renting homes from non-South Africans were clearly targeted during events.



The South African Human Rights Commission **recently stated**, “An attack under the guise of crime prevention, aimed at a particular vulnerable group on the basis of their birth outside of South Africa is an infringement of the rights within our Constitution.”

Rosettenville, Johannesburg

Widespread violence attracted attention on 11 February. Around two weeks before, local structures of the ANC, the EFF and SANCO (the South African National Civic Organisation) called an urgent community meeting in Rosettenville in response to the **eviction** of an elderly couple from a Nigerian owned house after they refused to pay rent. When community members tried to force the couple back into the house, the Nigerian owner called the police and the couple were arrested.

At the subsequent community meeting, the discussion was dominated by complaints about drug dens and prostitution in the area, for which Nigerians were blamed.

It was during this meeting that community members **decided to organise a march** to rid the community of the “unwanted” presence of Nigerians on 5 February.

Sunday, 5 February

Local residents **marched to the Moffat View police station** to submit a memorandum calling for action to be taken against Nigerians who they blamed for the proliferation of drugs and prostitution in the area.

The organisers of the anti-immigrant march in Pretoria on 24 February, the “**Mamelodi Concerned Residence**,” **joined the march in Rosettenville** to the Moffat View police station. **According to** a member of the Mamelodi residents association, “We went to the Moffat View police station to submit the memorandum, but when we came back the community was still in pain and frustrated. We support them.”

Upon returning to Rosettenville, locals **set fire to three Nigerian nationals’ homes and one business**. Nearly five hundred people marched through the neighbourhood searching for alleged drug dens, escorted by the Johannesburg Metro Police (JMPD).

The following day, on 6 February, **no arrests had been made**, according to police spokesperson Captain Masondo. Police opened a case of malicious damage to property and public violence.



Accounts of Events on 5 February in Rosettenville:

- Gauteng police spokesperson, **Captain Mavela Masondo stated**, “Residents identified houses of what they believed to belong to drug dealers and brothel owners. They then took out the furniture out of the properties and burned them.”
- **An organiser of the march to the police station said**, “We stood up for ourselves and decided to do something about it. The community is doing things for itself. We never burnt any property, so to speak. We cleaned it, that’s how we view it. We cleaned the very same property that’s used as a brothel.”
- Despite the presence of authorities, **an eyewitness who took part in the march said** the police were powerless to stop the attacks on the Nigerians’ property because crowds were too large.

After the properties were set on fire on 5 February **Johannesburg mayor Herman Mashaba visited the area** and said the city was already setting up a **specialised JMPD task team** to conduct regular raids on alleged drug dens.² The constitutionality of these raids is questionable.

Mayor Mashaba **commented** further on 5 February that “According to community members, these homes are illegally occupied by Nigerian foreign nationals who run the homes as brothels and have girls as young as nine years old working as prostitutes. Many of the women in these brothels are also alleged to have no official identification documentation...Some of these women who work as prostitutes told me that the brothels are supported by officers from Moffat View police station.”

The mayor added that he was concerned with **hijacked houses** in Rosettenville and surrounding areas. “What is worrying is that after hijacking buildings, immediately they start building illegal structures without even applying to the city.”³

In early February, DA Councillor Tyrell Meyers also **noted** the hijacking of houses in the Johannesburg areas of Rosettenville, La Rochelle, Moffat View, Regents Park, South Hills and Turffontein was common. Meyers claimed the property hijackers worked in syndicates that included people in the deeds office, the city council, City Power and Johannesburg Water, as well as within the police and sheriff's office.

² Mayor Mashaba also **said** municipal courts were being created that would have their own prosecutors and magistrates who would not fall under the National Prosecuting Authority. They will deal with issues relating to bylaws.

³ During his first 100 days in office statements in December 2016, Mayor Mashaba **said** in relation to crime and migration, “They’re holding our country to ransom and I’m going to be the last South African to allow it. I’ve got constraints as local government, because the national government has opened our borders to criminality.” He further said those living in the city illegally and involved in criminal activity will be targeted.



Saturday, 11 February

Rosettenville residents **claimed** Nigerians were behind criminal activity in the area and that police were complicit in the crimes. Residents further claimed police were taking bribes and were among the young sex workers' clients.

Angry residents went on to **set fire to 12 houses** while searching for Nigerians in the area.

Accounts of Events on 11 February in Rosettenville:

- A 55 year old local woman **said**, “We cannot tolerate the evil the foreign nationals are perpetrating here. They are messing the future of our children. They sleep with them all day and send them out at night to sell their bodies”.
- Angry residents **torched** numerous homes, one of which belonged to a South African truck driver.
- During the **violence**, a mechanic from Malawi was **beaten by a crowd** accusing him of being a Nigerian drug-dealer. He recounts how residents, who had earlier set a neighbour's house alight, came banging on his door demanding to talk to Nigerians living on the property. He escaped with his four-year-old daughter and along with his wife, **watched his home burn** with all its belongings.
- Next door, an Ethiopian-owned tuckshop was **completely looted**. According to a witness, “The shop owner locked the shutter and ran for his life when he saw these people coming. They smashed the shutter broken and took everything very quickly. Even the fridges were stolen. The police were just watching, but there were too many people, maybe hundreds.”

On 13 February, a high-level government delegation led by Home Affairs Minister Malusi **Gigaba** visited Yeoville, Mayfair and Rosettenville along with Community Safety MEC Sizakele Nkosi-Malobane and officials from the City of Johannesburg to meet foreign nationals, inspect the damaged buildings and hold a community meeting in **Rosettenville**. Minister Gigaba **engaged** residents of Rosettenville about crime and challenges in the area but residents said they have had enough of foreigners running brothels and selling drugs.

On 19 February, the Reclaim Our Community movement stated that many of the drug dens are being run by foreign nationals in Rosettenville. A representative from the movement said, “There is no brothel run by any other nationality but Nigerians and we are firm on that.”



Gauteng police spokesperson Kay Makhubela **reported** on 17 February that 18 Nigerians had been arrested since the 13th for crimes related to drug dealing and prostitution. Police operations, he said, had been extended to other areas, including central Johannesburg and Pretoria.

On 23 February, police **announced** they had arrested 42 people following the xenophobic attacks in Rosettenville. None of the arrests announced, however, were for violence or damage caused during the attacks. **According to** Lieutenant General Deliwe de Lange:

- One person was arrested for possession of an unlicensed firearm,
- 14 people were arrested for possession of or dealing in drugs and
- 27 foreigners were arrested for lack of proper documentation

The arrests were made after Rosettenville residents called a **hotline** number set up by police on 13 February. Based on the openly xenophobic statements made by community members, this begs the question of whether calls and later arrests targeted foreigners.

Lieutenant de Lange also stated police had **arrested** a number of people for crimes ranging from business robbery to possession of illegal firearms in Soshanguve, Mabopane, Rietgat, and Garankuwa.

Pretoria West

Two weeks prior to the Pretoria West attacks on the morning of 18 February, a Nigerian businessman's **car workshop was set alight** without warning. Though he worked alongside Pretoria West residents for nearly 10 years, an angry crowd raided his workshop in search of drugs and set it on fire.

Saturday, 18 February

Community members of Pretoria West, near Atteridgeville, raided homes they alleged were being used as brothels and drug dens.

Two to three homes and numerous vehicles belonging to foreign nationals were set on fire. Additionally, numerous residences were raided and looted by a mob of around 300 local residents.



Accounts of Events on 18 February in Pretoria West:

- Residents of Pretoria West **raided homes** they alleged were being used as brothels and drug dens. They called for "pimps" to release prostitutes. At least **two houses** were set alight and several vehicles and homes were **looted**.
- One **woman** described how a **group of locals went from house to house**, attacking people. "They went to that house across that street and they searched, started attacking people inside there. We didn't know what was happening, it was just rumoured that they are looking for drugs and prostitutes."
- A South African woman who was also chased out of her home **said**, "There are immigrants who own brothels and sell drugs, but not all foreigners are bad." She said "South Africans wanted to plunder it [my home] because it belongs to a Congolese national. They don't like it when foreigners own property."
- Between 8:00 and 12:00 AM, at least **three** houses were set alight and various residences were looted, according to *News 24*. The properties involved were mostly owned by or occupied by foreigners.
- An asylum seeker from Nigeria and a **resident** of a house in Court Street in Pretoria West woke up to dozens of **people** banging outside their doors. He said, "At 8 AM, people stormed into our house and shouted: 'All foreigners must leave!'" The men looted the house and set it on fire.
- In the afternoon, **police fired rubber bullets** at a group of about 300 South Africans. At least seven police vehicles were used to block off WF Nkomo Street and a police helicopter was also involved in the operation.
- Later in the afternoon, journalists from the newspaper *Rapport* **witnessed** a group of people storm the house of a Zimbabwean refugee and begin to plunder it, while a police vehicle passed by without taking any action.
- Some **South Africans** as well as Congolese nationals had their houses ransacked. They said the mob, which claimed to be looking for drugs, found nothing but instead stole their belongings.
- A Nigerian man **said** the mob forced their way into his house and stole his TV, laptop and cell phone.
- A journalist from *News24* **watched** as a group of at least 50 people forced their way into a block of flats along WF Nkomo Street, stealing residents' belongings and demanding that Nigerians leave the country.

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- A woman whose **house** was also vandalised cried hysterically while police looked on.
- Some among the **angry** mob were drinking beer during the raid. At least five police officials looked on as the mob forced its way into the block of flats.
- Shops in and around the area **closed** and people left the area in search of safety.

Gauteng police **stated** the violent acts and damage to property carried out by community members in Pretoria West were not xenophobic attacks.

Authorities stated the following day, on 19 February, that no one was injured and no arrests had been made. According to **police spokesperson** Captain Augustinah Selepe, two complaints of arson and one complaint of public violence had been lodged with the police.

Atteridgeville and Lotus Gardens, Pretoria

Monday, 20 February

Two days after the raids in Pretoria West, large groups of residents in nearby Atteridgeville looted multiple foreign-run shops during the evening of 20 February, at around 7 PM. The looting escalated uncontrollably to Lotus Gardens around 9 pm and to Mamelodi East.

In total, 30 shops were looted in Atteridgeville, Lotus Gardens and Mamelodi East. Occupants were assaulted by locals claiming the properties are being used as drug dens and brothels.

Accounts of events on 20 February in Atteridgeville and Lotus Gardens:

- A resident of Atteridgeville **said** they would not sit back and watch the people of Pretoria West do a better job than them. “Our neighbours dealt with foreigners doing illegal things and we are dealing with those who have killed our spazas,” said the resident.
- Police spokesperson Captain Bonginkosi Msimango **said** the looting started at about 7pm in Atteridgeville, with looters moving from one shop to the next. “The situation was very tense. The looting escalated to Lotus Gardens around 9pm, where shops were completely looted. It became very uncontrollable in a short space of time.”
- **30 shops were looted** in Atteridgeville and Lotus Gardens and the occupants were assaulted by locals who claimed the properties are being used as drug dens and brothels.

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- The following day, authorities **announced** no arrests had been made.

Friday, 24 February

In the early hours of Friday, 24 February, Atteridgeville residents blocked entrances to Atteridgeville with burning tyres ahead of the planned anti-immigrant march in Pretoria CBD. Protesters threw rocks, looted shops run by foreign nationals and were seen trying to enter flats where foreigners reside.

- Roads were **barricaded** with burning tyres by protesters in Atteridgeville in the early morning.
- Protesters threw **rocks**, burned tyres and looted shops belonging to foreign nationals.
- **Residents** raised concerns of poor police visibility in the area and described tense scenes on the ground, with protestors being ferried into the township by taxis and seen trying to enter a block of flats where foreigners reside.

Mamelodi East, Pretoria

As in Rosettenville and Pretoria West, xenophobic incidents occurred in Mamelodi East prior to large scale events this month.

During the week of 6 February some residents of the Phomolong informal settlement in Mamelodi were told that Zimbabweans occupied RDP houses in **Hatherley** meant for them, causing a protest in the Pretoria east township.

Tuesday, 7 February

Mamelodi residents took to the streets on Tuesday morning in protest against poor service delivery in the area. The Tshwane Metro Police Department (TMPD) reported protesters barricading Solomon Mahlangu Drive, which caused heavy delays out of Mamelodi.



Accounts of Events on 7 February in Mamelodi East:

- Mamelodi residents **protested** by blocking a road that leads to RDP houses in the Hatherley area, which they accuse foreign nationals of illegally occupying.
- When the *Mail & Guardian* **visited** the RDP development in Hatherley the same week, the only people found occupying the houses were employees of the security company, the Red Ants.
- The “Mamelodi Concerned Residence” Association **insisted their claims were legitimate**, however, and that illegal occupation was commonplace in the city.

Monday, 20 February

Attacks originating in Atteridgeville on 20 February also **escalated** to Mamelodi East. It is not known how many homes and/or shops were looted or whether residents were assaulted during this incident.

- **Foreigners** who own spaza shops in Mamelodi locked up their businesses on Tuesday, 21 February.

Anti-Immigrant March in Pretoria CBD

Friday, 24 February

The above events culminated in a planned anti-immigrant march organized by the “Mamelodi Concerned Residence” association for 24 February in Pretoria CBD. Reports of the scheduled march began emerging around 19 January across the country, spurring fear amongst non-South Africans nationwide⁴.

The flyer distributed by the association in January included hate speech and incorrect information on the amount of foreign nationals in South Africa, as well as on the extent to which they are employed in the country.

⁴ Organisers of the anti-immigrant march also attended the march by Rosettenville residents to the Moffat View police station on 5 February.



Accounts of Events Involving Anti-Immigrant March on 24 February in/around Pretoria CBD:

- Over 1000 people were expected to take part in the protest in Pretoria CBD. **Protesters included** residents from Mamelodi, Atteridgeville and Soshanguve.
- The “Mamelodi Concerned Residence” Association and others marched to the Department of Home Affairs to submit a memorandum calling for foreigners not to be allowed to work in South Africa.
- Marching from Atteridgeville to Pretoria City Centre, South Africans and Somali nationals **clashed** in Marabastad, near Pretoria CBD. Police formed a barricade between the two groups and fired stun grenades and **rubber bullets** to separate the two groups.
- **A mob of about 1,000** angry Atteridgeville residents armed with sticks and iron bars ransacked a camp near the Tshwane Events Centre. The camp was used by foreigners and others attending a church function.
- Several groups **marched** through the city. One group attacked Somali immigrants.
- Reports of looting in Church St in full view of the police were received by the UNHCR.
- A small **clash between foreign shop owners and South African marchers** also broke out in Christoffel Street.
- On Du Toit Street, police **ordered** a group of armed marchers that had turned violent to get down on the ground, disarmed them and put them into the back of two police trucks.
- In the Pretoria CBD, police **fired** stun grenades near the Department of Home Affairs building. A police helicopter hovered overhead and public order police officers oversaw the large crowd.
- At one point, the crowd **tried to push past the police**. Many carried sticks, rods and other items.
- A group of about 20 South Africans were **arrested** late on Friday afternoon and found in possession of multiple needles and packets of drugs. A Tshwane metro police officer said after the arrest, "Look at this. They say they're marching against drugs, but look at all those drugs."
- Yet, even after the arrest, protesters **descended** on a Somali-owned grocery store in Pretoria Central, blaming the owner and those who worked there for distributing the

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drug nyaope and for threatening South Africans with firearms. The police searched the premises for weapons and drugs and did not find any.

- A tweet posted on [News 24](#) states a Nigerian man was shot in Pretoria West.
- The police were also investigating reports of a [newspaper truck being looted](#).

According to acting police commissioner Khomotso Phahlane on Friday 24 February, police arrested 136 people in Pretoria West over the past 24 hours, including during the anti-immigrant march that morning.

People were **arrested** in connection with various crimes, including looting that took place in Atteridgeville and Pretoria West on the morning of February 24.

Commissioner Phahlane did not say how many of those arrested were foreign nationals and how many were South Africans. Also, there have been no known arrests for assaults committed during attacks.

Though vague information has been provided on the nature of arrests, Table 3 attempts to summarise existing reports of the response of law enforcement to this month's incidents. Where known, the reasons for arrest vary, including lack of documentation, possession of drugs, possession of unlicensed firearm and damage to property. The nationality of arrestees is also included in the table where known, along with the types of complaints lodged with police and the types of cases opened by police.



Table 3: Police Response to February 2017 Raids, Lootings, and Violence

Arrests	Date of Attacks	Number of Arrests	Complaints Lodged with Police or Cases opened	Nationality of Arrestees	Reasons for Arrest			
					Documents	Drugs	Fire-arms	Damage/Property
Rosettenville	5 Feb	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 case of malicious damage to property opened • 1 case of public violence opened 	-	-	-	-	-
Rosettenville	11 Feb	42	-	18* Nigerian	27	14	1	0
Pretoria West	18 Feb	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 complaints of arson lodged • 1 complaint of public violence lodged 	-	-	-	-	-
Atteridgeville, Lotus Gardens & Mamelodi E	20 Feb	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Atteridgeville & Pretoria CBD March	24 Feb	136	-	20 South African	UNKN	UNKN	UNKN	Multiple

*It is unclear from reports whether the arrests of 18 Nigerian nationals **announced** by Gauteng police spokesperson Kay Makhubela on 17 February are included within the figure of 42 arrests **announced** on 23 February by Lieutenant General Deliwe de Lange.

For more information on Xenowatch or this brief, visit Xenowatch.org or contact xenowatch@migration.org.za.